

Military Wedding Protocol and Etiquette

Military wedding traditions and customs date back to the early ages when officers carried swords for more than ceremonial purposes. Today, many women serve in the military, which adds new rules of etiquette to the ceremony. This article will give you an overview of how to respect the traditions of the armed forces and still have a spectacular wedding.

Military Wedding Attire for the bridal party starts with the overall formality of the wedding. For instance, if the wedding is white tie tuxedos, the officers will wear full dress regalia. In the case of a black tie or less formal wedding, an officer could wear a dinner uniform. Non-commissioned and lower ranking service members should wear a well presented standard uniform dress.

What about female officers? It's really up to the bride. She may wear her white wedding gown or her uniform if she chooses. The same formality rules apply to both service women and men.

Another consideration is to look to the rules of the different branches of the military for guidelines in attire.

Military Ceremony Traditions

Each service branch has its own rendition of the arch of swords ceremony. We'll mention a few protocol rules here, but it's best to check into each of the traditions if you are looking to add a true military feel to the ceremony:

- **Army:** Each officer holds a ceremonial sword over the couple as they leave the altar and as they leave the church or chapel. As the couple passes through the last two swordsmen, these two officers cross their swords to prevent the couple from leaving. The second officer behind the bride swats the bride on the rear end and says, "Welcome to the Army." Then they are allowed to leave arch.
- **Navy/Marines:** Swordsmen in these branches also serve as ushers, and they do not swat the bride at the end of the procession.
- **Air Force:** In this branch, the sword bearers turn to face the bride as she comes down the aisle and then rotate to face her as she passes. They face the Bible during the ceremony. As the couple leaves, they again rotate to watch the bride leave.
- In all sword ceremonies, sword bearers wear white gloves.



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- **Commanding officers** sit on the front row with his/her spouse, if the parents are not present. If the parents are present, they sit next to the family of the military member getting married.
- **Military chaplains** cannot charge a fee for performing the service. However, military tradition requires that he/she receives a formal invitation to the reception along with his/her spouse.

Military Cake Tradition

In addition to elaborate sword ceremonies, a military tradition is to cut the cake with a sword. This is done with the groom holding his hand over the bride's as they cut the cake. Each branch of the military does the cutting of the cake a little differently, so it's best to check with an expert on that branch when planning your wedding reception. One big no-no is to not decorate the sword. This applies across all military branches.

Consult with your wedding planner or someone in the military. If you are holding a military marriage service, the chaplain or officer can guide you in proper attire and etiquette protocols.



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